AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE AIR UNIVERSITY

ENGAGING AFRICAN SUB-REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO IMPROVE CONTINENTAL STABILITY AND SECURITY

by

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Abstract

The United States has been engaged on the African continent for one reason or another for many decades and despite the recent change in presidential administrations, it is likely that Africa will remain in the national security consciousness for the foreseeable future. Africa is a socially complex area of the world, with a diverse demographic, expanding population, and vast, untapped resources. The continent is important to U.S. national security objectives not only because of the threat of terrorism, but for economic and humanitarian reasons, as well. While there are several programs and initiatives to further the interests of both Africans and the United States, perhaps one of the best ways in which to engage Africa is through sub-regional organizations like ECOWAS. While engagement is important, the type of engagement and how the U.S. presents itself are equally important. Thus, an effective way to capitalize on sub-regional engagement and obtain the most benefit is to emulate the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability program. This program is a visible, viable means in which to improve ECOWAS's ability to support itself and its member states' stability and interests in the long term.

Introduction

"To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right."

-- President John F. Kennedy

Despite the recent change in presidential administrations, it is likely that Africa will remain in the national security consciousness for the foreseeable future. Africa continues to be a socially complex area of the world, with a diverse demographic, expanding population, and vast, untapped resources that have piqued the interest of various international competitors, most notably the European Union member nations (many of whom have and/or maintain ties with former colonies) and emerging economic powers such as China. The continent is important to U.S. national security objectives not only because of the threat of terrorism, but for economic and humanitarian reasons, as well. Thus, despite the recent change in U.S. presidential administrations, Africa will more than likely remain on the agenda throughout the foreseeable future.

But the question remains: what is the best manner in which to proceed? And once that decision is made, how should the U.S. implement the decision? The U.S. has engaged the African Union, individual countries, and other Western powers in the past, sometimes quite successfully, but other times with limited effect. In the case of United States Africa Command, the question is more narrow: what "partner-entities" give the command the most reach, and once engaged with said partners, what should the command actually do to focus its efforts?

This paper will first highlight, in general terms, historical issues that affect Africa, as well as take a look at recent U.S. programs that have been used to address these problems. Then, through an examination of common African interests, once again in general terms, this paper will segue into a short description and examination of how one particular sub-regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), addresses the interests of its constituent member states. Then, building on this history and the focus on ECOWAS, this paper will argue that sub-regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, are effective organizations for AFRICOM to engage in order to see rapid change on the African continent. Finally, this paper will offer an argument that emulating the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability program is a visible, viable means in which to improve these organizations' ability to support themselves and their own stability and interests in the long term.

BACKGROUND

Africa: History and Issues

It is impossible to craft effective strategies and policies for engaging such a vast and diverse continent as Africa without understanding its history and the relevant issues many African governments face day-to-day. Understandably, no two African governments are the same, but understanding history and issues in general terms can help inform efforts and guide future research. From a historical standpoint, the legacy of European colonialism simmers in the background, and will more than likely color both the reaction and perception of local populations to future U.S. intervention, efforts, aid and policies. Thus, it is important for any U.S. policy maker to at least be aware of it.

Western powers, particularly European powers, have had interaction with Africans effectively since the early 1400s. ² Other than small coastal settlements supporting commerce

and shipping, much of the continent was mainly bypassed in favor of the more lucrative Indian Ocean trade route. The African slave trade began in the late sixteenth century due to large labor needs in South America and Caribbean sugar plantations.³ The end of the African slave trade began in 1772 when the British banned it inside Great Britain, was furthered when Britain banned it from all its colonies, and effectively ended when the Arab slave trade ended in the late 1800s.⁴ The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 legitimized the colonization of the continent among the European powers and recognized the partitioning of Africa.⁵ This colonization, or "Scramble for Africa," by seven European powers (Germany, Italy, Portugal, France, Britain, Spain and Belgium) was largely complete by 1912.⁶

The end of European colonialism, often referred to as "decolonization," can be traced to the end of World War Two, following various crises during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Decolonization in Africa officially started in 1957 when Ghana gained its independence.⁷

African decolonization gained greater momentum in 1960 when the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 1514 (xv), *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;* this resolution served as a catalyst for complete decolonization within roughly 20 years from that point.⁸ After a 23 year process, the last European colony in Africa (Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) gained its independence in 1980.⁹

Decolonization left Africa with political borders that were, for the most part, arbitrarily aligned based on which European power dominated the region. Because of this, a rather widespread issue that many African governments must deal with is the diverse ethnic and religious makeup of their countries that leads to a lack of homogeneity within the national makeup of the various states. For example, in the case of religion, some estimates show Islam as the dominant religion, with as many as one third of the continental population being Muslim. ¹⁰ Be

that as it may, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa average roughly 2.9 different major religious groups within the national border, with some countries having as many as five major religious groups within their borders.¹¹ This diverse religious make-up, coupled with poor governance, simmering ethnic strife and corruption, sometimes leads to open conflict.

The lack of national homogeneity aside, another factor contributing to instability in Africa is corruption and the prevalence of "patronage politics," where loyalty is bought through the distribution of public goods, such as tax breaks, major public works projects, etc. 12

Corruption is a problem because it tends to delegitimize foreign actions in the eyes of the local populace because of the connections made between the U.S., as well as others, dealing with corrupt governments. In other words, the perception is that those who deal with the corrupt must also be corrupt themselves, and thus not really there to help the people so much as enrich themselves. This perception is detrimental in the long term for U.S. interests for several reasons. For example, it enables enemy organizations, such as Al Qaeda, to capitalize on the disconnect and possibly increase local support. Also, by allowing corrupt governments to be the handlers of aid funds and resources, it potentially dilutes the effectiveness and reach of said dollars and resources.

Poverty, like corruption, is yet another issue that affects the entire continent. In spite of supplying the U.S. with roughly 15 percent of its annual oil imports, and growing trade with other international partners such as China and the European Union, Africa as a whole remains the poorest region of the world. While annual figures vary somewhat depending on the source, in 2006 the Gross Domestic Product for the entire continent was roughly \$2 trillion, or about \$2200 per person. But this figure only tells part of the story. When the focus is shifted to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), one can see a trend of disproportionate wealth distribution. In 2004, 41

percent of the SSA population subsisted on or below \$1 per day.¹⁵ This number was little changed from 1981, where 42.4 percent of the population lived at this level.¹⁶ When compared with other parts of the world, like East Asia and the Pacific Rim, there is an evident and pervasive level of poverty that affects much of the continent.¹⁷ Poverty remains a relevant issue to both U.S. and African national interests because unfettered poverty can lead to civil strife and help foment radicalism and terrorist activity.

Two interrelated issues that can't be ignored are genocide and the subsequent problem with refugees. In 1994, an estimated 800,000 people were murdered over 100 days in Rwanda. Rwanda, nearly 400,000 people have died and about 2.3 million people have been displaced in the Darfur region of Sudan. These cases, along with civil unrest and seemingly frequent incidents of either large-scale or small-scale warfare, often lead to large refugee migrations that can destabilize neighboring governments and cause a multitude of problems for already weak and/or failing states.

Finally, HIV/AIDS continues to be a persistent problem for Sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the 2008 United Nations Global Report on AIDS, while Africa as a whole has seen a 25% decline in the number of young pregnant women living with HIV, the region still accounts for 67% of all people living with HIV and 75% of the annual deaths. More pointedly, *southern*Africa possesses 35% of the global HIV infections and 38% of the AIDS deaths for 2007. The infection rate is so pervasive that it is estimated for African forces under arms, as many as 40-60% of combatants are infected, posing problems for governments planning for their armed forces to respond to regional or even internal crises. 22

Recent U.S. Initiatives

Despite all the problems outlined above, or perhaps because of them, there have been many U.S. initiatives within the past decade to help place Africa front and center on the American foreign policy agenda and address some of the issues that have been outlined above. For example, one of the major ways, aside from direct aid and humanitarian assistance programs, to fight poverty is to increase commerce. Thus, one of the major financial U.S. initiatives is the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) which was passed in May 2000.²³ A Clinton-era law designed to stimulate trade and create job growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, the legislation allows for duty-free import of goods, particularly textiles, from countries so-designated as beneficiaries by the President.²⁴ Currently 41 countries are eligible in one form or another under AGOA, and the legislation has resulted in the United States purchasing \$51.1 billion in goods from the AGOA countries in 2007, an increase of 16% over 2006.²⁵

Another major initiative, implemented during the Bush administration, was the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). A five year, \$15 billion program, the initiative was a bipartisan response and recognition that the HIV/AIDS pandemic required high-level attention from the U.S. government.²⁶ The program focuses on 12 African countries and has the goal of bringing anti-retroviral treatment to 2 million people, prevent infection in 7 million people, and care for millions more.²⁷ Although Africa is the focus, assistance is not limited to the continent only, as the program also includes three countries (Vietnam, Guyana, and Haiti) outside of Africa.²⁸ In fiscal year 2006 alone, the program expended \$1.2 billion in assistance and expanded Department of State assistance to the Sub-Saharan region of Africa by 8,000 percent.²⁹

Aside from the foreign aid programs and HIV/AIDS initiatives, arguably one of the most important developments, from a military perspective, is the creation of the United States Africa

Command (AFRICOM). The stated mission of AFRICOM is to "...conduct sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment..."³⁰

AFRICOM has the intended purpose of integrating non-Department of Defense (DoD) organizations into its command structure in order to assure a "whole of government" approach to African engagement. Senior staff positions within the command include representatives that are not part of the DoD. For example, the staff includes personnel from the Treasury Department as well as advisors from the State Department for foreign policy and development and humanitarian assistance advisors from USAID. ³¹ Furthermore, Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates was appointed as the Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities, a post equivalent to that of a deputy commander and integral to the inter-agency intent of the command. ³² Although a holistic approach is the intent, it should be stressed, as did Vice Admiral Moeller during a presentation at the Brookings Institution, that the purpose of AFRICOM is not to assume responsibility for U.S. foreign policy, but to facilitate military-to-military cooperation among African nations and to support other government organizations in the execution of their missions in order to have a more coherent approach to the continent. ³³

THE FUTURE OF U.S. POLICY

Under the Bush administration, Africa was afforded a relatively high level of attention.

The overall strategy was to "...promote economic development and the expansion of effective, democratic governance so that African states can take the lead in addressing African challenges." The Bush administration undertook several initiatives to support this effort, such as the Africa Education Initiative and the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa. Also, of particular

fanfare, was the five-year, \$15 billion effort to combat the near-pandemic occurrence of HIV/AIDS on the continent.³⁶

While the Obama administration has not released its formal national security strategy, hints of what the Obama strategy will be with regard to Africa can be gleaned from various sources. In two podcasts from 2006, then-Senator Obama aggressively calls for action on the Darfur Crisis and outlined aid packages and partnership strategies.³⁷ Specifically, he indicates that the U.S. will have to "...provide this... force with our own lift and logistics assets. We're going to have to provide our military hardware, like transport... and so forth." In short, he calls for a major commitment, beyond rhetoric, of U.S. forces and resources to support the crisis.

The most significant indicator of President Obama's intention toward Africa, though, can be found in an article he published in the journal *Foreign Affairs* while he was running in the 2008 Democratic primaries. In that article, then-candidate Obama underscores the pressing need for action in Darfur by indicating he would strengthen support to the African Union and other partners throughout Africa that have the power to effect change in the troubled region.³⁹ Specifically, he says:

In Africa, we have allowed genocide to persist for over four years in Darfur and have not done nearly enough to answer the African Union's call for more support to stop the killing. I will rebuild our ties to our allies in Europe and Asia and strengthen our partnerships throughout the Americas and Africa. 40

He further indicated the importance of effective collaboration on global issues with emerging powers, and goes on to name South Africa directly as one of the key players the U.S. needs to engage in order to be globally successful.⁴¹

Of course, more details will emerge once the new national security strategy capstone document is published, but recent testimony to Congress from General William "Kip" Ward, the commander of AFRICOM, lends insight into what the current administration plans to do in

Africa and what the stated national interests may be. Specifically, General Ward identified seven strategic interests:

Prevent attacks against Americans by transnational threats emanating from Africa; prevent acquisition, transfer, or transit of WMD material and expertise; maintain our freedom of movement into and through the AOR; foster the prevention, mitigation, or containment of conflict; foster sustained stability; mitigate the effects of significant humanitarian crises or natural disasters; deter and contain pandemic influenza in the AOR⁴²

Furthermore, General Ward also outlined three key endstates. To paraphrase, these endstates were to enable African countries and organizations to provide for their own security and that of the continent, mitigate violent extremism, and foster African militaries that are responsive to civilian authority and abide by human rights norms. Finally, he identified five strategic objectives for the command that include defeating Al Qaeda, ensuring peace operations capacity is sufficient, protecting populations from contagious diseases, improving security through military support to U.S. government efforts, and cooperating with African states in the facilitation of an environment inhospitable to WMDs.

To be sure, what AFRICOM's agenda suggests is that Africa will remain a focus area within the greater U.S. national security strategy for the foreseeable future. Coupled with President Obama's past statements, one can expect that along with steady funding requests, there is a possibility of U.S. involvement in future conflicts within the region to a greater degree than in the recent past.

THE WAY AHEAD: SUB-REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Keeping in mind issues, history, and U.S. priorities, a logical way for the U.S. to effectively achieve its policy goals and further its interests vis-à-vis those of African states is to engage sub-regional institutions. Unlike the African Union, which seeks to encompass all African states, sub-regional organizations have a particular focus, such as a specific region, or a

specific set of common values. One such organization, ECOWAS, is a good example of an organization that can benefit greatly from direct AFRICOM security engagement.

ECOWAS: A Model for Sub-Regional Integration

ECOWAS is a treaty-based group of fifteen member states in the West African region founded in 1975 and encompasses almost 250 million people. Headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria, the organization consists of an Executive Commission, a Community Parliament, a Community Court of Justice, and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development. The Executive Commission consists of a President, a Vice-President and seven commissioners that oversee finance, agriculture, infrastructure, economic policy, political affairs, and trade. The Community Parliament is composed of 115 seats, with each member state having a minimum of 5 seats and the remaining seats being distributed according to population. According to the ECOWAS website, the Parliament is:

...empowered to consider issues concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens; interconnection of energy networks, interconnection of telecommunications systems; increased cooperation in the area of radio, television and other intra- and intercommunity media links; as well as development of national communications system (sic). 49

The parliament holds two regular sessions, lasting three months for each session.⁵⁰ The first session starts in May, with the second beginning in September.⁵¹ The governing structure is an important feature of ECOWAS because it reflects an emphasis on democratic governing principles, which are important to U.S. interests.

The treaty that established ECOWAS also established a fund as a financial instrument of the community that was later, in 1999, transformed into the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development.⁵² The bank was again reorganized in 2006 and its main objective is to "…contribute towards the economic development of West Africa through the financing of

ECOWAS..."⁵³ The bank focuses on various investment priorities, including basic transportation, agriculture, rural development and health support.⁵⁴

ECOWAS also has a peacekeeping and peace enforcement arm called the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).⁵⁵ As an instrument of ECOWAS, ECOMOG is authorized to intervene in the following instances: internal armed conflict of a member state, conflict between two or more member states, humanitarian disaster or the overthrow of a democratically elected government, and any situation that council members deem appropriate.⁵⁶ Through ECOMOG, ECOWAS was involved in the 1990s addressing conflicts in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, as well as the stabilization of Liberia in 1989.⁵⁷ Again, in 1992, ECOMOG was responsible for repelling rebel forces from the Liberian capital of Monrovia and helped set the stage for a United Nations observer mission in 1993.⁵⁸ In the first part of this decade, ECOWAS troops were involved in monitoring the cease-fire following the Cote d'Ivoire civil war as well as deploying peacekeepers to Monrovia after Charles Taylor stepped down.⁵⁹ In each of these instances of intervention, a chief impediment to ECOMOG achieving maximum effectiveness was the lack of funding and logistical support.⁶⁰

By 2010, ECOMOG will be effectively replaced by a regional standby force as part of the African Union "Draft Framework for a Common African Defence and Security Policy." This standby force, one of five regionally based brigades, will be made up of 6,500 troops, and will be used under the auspices of the African Union. Its authorized uses will include intervention in border wars and internal conflicts, preventive deployments (peacekeeping), peace building (otherwise known as peacemaking), observer missions, humanitarian assistance missions, as well as requirements set forth by ECOWAS. More specifically, an initial capability of 1,500 troops will be able to deploy within 30 days, with follow-on forces to follow within 90 days of

notification, with the ability to sustain themselves for 90 additional days following deployment.⁶³ As with many other initiatives related to Africa, cost is a significant limiting factor and will need to be addressed if the stand-by force is to come to fruition.⁶⁴

African Interests

While it's important to understand what U.S. interests are, often times the interests of aid recipients are often overlooked, causing a situation where things are "done to" the recipient governments rather than "done with" the recipient governments. To prevent a "neo-colonial" perception by African partners, the United States needs to ensure that it listens as well as acts in order to ensure that not only are its actions well received, but also successful. For example, while the PEPFAR program has been praised in its scope and intent, criticisms of the PEPFAR program include that it was introduced without prior consultation with the recipient governments, its bilateral approach undervalues the integration of U.S. efforts with other players/states, it doesn't focus enough on creating a sustainable public health infrastructure, and it does not comprehensively address prevention efforts. 65

These criticisms indicate that further study and understanding of the diverse African interests is warranted prior to any policy development. ECOWAS provides direct insight into its member's interests via the "ECOWAS Vision Document." Although the current iteration is still in draft form, the March 2009 document is valuable for identifying key interest areas that can be focused on in concert with U.S. goals, interests and programs. Specifically stated, ECOWAS interests include consolidating the gains of peace and stability throughout the region by strengthening multi-party democratic governance; eradicating poverty; expand and diversify economic activity and economic infrastructure; increase intra-regional trade and integration;

reduce dependency on foreign aid and increase self-sufficiency; and instill principles of good governance and eliminate corruption within government and public institutions.⁶⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving in concert with allies and partners is essential for success. Many of ECOWAS's interests, as outlined above, align very well with those of the U.S. Fighting poverty, improving self-sufficiency, halting the spread of infectious diseases are common interests that lay a common framework for future engagement and success. At the sub-regional level, ECOWAS offers an already established institutional framework that AFRICOM can engage in its security assistance mission, thus offering a readily available partner.

There are several reasons sub-regional engagement will pay dividends in the future. First, AFRICOM stands a good chance of getting "more bang for the buck" because resources (training, equipment, time, effort, relationships) can be funneled to ECOWAS and that organization can determine how member states receive the resources through its established bureaucracy. Second, ECOWAS already has a military arm, in this case ECOMOG and in the future the standby force, so engaging ECOWAS and other similarly structured sub-regional organizations will improve these organization's self-sufficiency, which is a stated common interest, and thus reduce the need for future large-scale international interventions as well as improve the reaction time on the continent when crises do occur. Finally, by supporting sub-regional organizations and getting them to "buy-in" to a partnership with AFRICOM, the U.S. can lower its long-term costs, commitments, and better communicate its interests and align them with the interests of ECOWAS member states, thereby gaining legitimacy at the grass-roots level.

But there are specific things that AFRICOM can do in order to ensure the success of ECOWAS and sister organizations. Keeping in mind that a primary purpose of AFRICOM is to improve security cooperation, it was noted previously that a key failing of ECOWAS was its lack of ability to logistically maintain its military forces in the field.⁶⁹ In order to address this issue directly, AFRICOM should partner with ECOWAS to stand up a force similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC).

SAC is a program involving ten NATO countries plus Finland and Sweden. Centered around three C-17 aircraft purchased by the member states, SAC's purpose is to improve the strategic airlift capacity of NATO nations through an indigenous unit that serves the needs of the member states. SAC incorporates aircrews and trained maintenance personnel from all member countries, although in this case it is commanded by a U.S. miliary aviation officer. Two aircraft were purchased through the Foreign Military Sales program and one was donated by the United States.

A dedicated strategic airlift unit such as SAC would be quite useful to ECOWAS, and the continent in general, for that matter. One of the key impediments to success for deployed peacekeepers is the ability to rapidly deploy and sustain the forces in the field. Having a strategic airlift capacity that is dedicated to ECOWAS and is properly funded and maintained will not only help further the interests of the ECOWAS member states, but will further the interests of the United States by improving security cooperation and enabling ECOWAS to become more self-sufficient. Furthermore, if the program were to prove successful with ECOWAS, it could be emulated with other sub-regional organizations that are similarly structured, or possibly be co-located with other African Union stand-by brigades to enhance the continent's overall readiness posture.

AFRICOM already has programs in place that can facilitate the development of an ECOWAS SAC. Aircraft could be purchased through the already established Foreign Military Sales program and financed through the Foreign Military Financing program. Training would be conducted and funded through the Global Peace Operations Initiative, a program designed to train peacekeeping forces and develop transportation and logistics architectures to facilitate deployments of those forces. U.S. forces needed for unit manning and training can be obtained through various means, but a creative way of doing it is to source air crews on a rotating basis through the AFRICOM National Guard State Partnership Program. In its current form, the program partners individual U.S. states with African countries and helps to promote access, professionalism and capabilities. There is no reason why this program couldn't be linked to ECOWAS instead of an individual country, thus providing a means for staffing U.S. commitments to the SAC program.

Since a common interest is self-sufficiency, over time, as ECOWAS and its member states become more able to sustain the SAC unit independently, the U.S. could reduce and eventually eliminate its manning presence. Also over time, it's possible that direct funding, assuming any is needed, could also be scaled back and eventually eliminated.

CONCLUSION

Africa continues to be a socially complex area of the world, with a diverse demographic, expanding population, and vast, untapped resources and it will most likely remain in the U.S. national security consciousness for the foreseeable future. The continent is important to U.S. national security objectives not only because of the threat of terrorism, but for economic and humanitarian reasons, as well. The best manner in which to proceed going forward is to focus on "pressure points" where U.S. interests align with African interests. ECOWAS can be an

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effective partner in addressing mutual interests, especially the interest of African self-sufficiency. In order to most effectively aid ECOWAS achieve its goal of self-sufficiency, the U.S., through AFRICOM, should emulate the NATO Strategic Airlift Capability program as a visible, viable means in which to improve ECOWAS's ability to support itself and foster stability and common interests for the long term.

¹ John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," (Washington, D.C., 20 January 1961), http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html

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¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Douglas C. Peifer, ed., *Stopping Mass Killings in Africa*, (Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama: Air University Press, 2008), 53.

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- ⁴⁵ ECOWAS Homepage, "ECOWAS in Brief," http://www.comm.ecowas.int/sec/index.php?id=about_a&lang=en lbid.
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- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁵ Francis V. Cupri. "Why the U.S. Should Robustly Support Pan African Organizations." *Parameters*, Winter 2005-2006. P 110. ECOMOG has also been referred to as the ECOWAS Cease-Fire Monitoring Group, using the same acronym of ECOMOG.
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- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 110.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 64-65.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 114.

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